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# FACTS: ABOUT:

## STUDY DRAFTS ON U.S. GRADE STANDARDS FOR FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

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The Fruit and Vegetable Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service prepares and distributes study drafts on U.S. grade standards for fruits and vegetables as the first step in establishing or revising U.S. grade standards. The purpose of the study draft is to:

1. Notify all who may be affected that the Fruit and Vegetable Division is considering making a proposal, and,
2. Obtain their ideas and recommendations on what is needed to aid in marketing and acceptance of the fruit or vegetable.

This paper summarizes the steps in developing U.S. grade standards for fresh and processed (canned, frozen, or dried) fruits and vegetables and explains how you can participate.

### WHAT ARE U.S. GRADE STANDARDS?

U.S. grade standards define the levels of quality, or grades, of an agricultural commodity. For fruits and vegetables, the standards specify requirements such as shape, color, texture, flavor, and freedom from defects, for each grade. The grades provide a common language of quality in marketing agricultural products and a way of measuring value as a basis for establishing prices.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), as authorized by the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946, establishes grade standards for food and farm products. Use of the grade standards or the official grading services to certify the grade of products is voluntary. Users must request and pay for official grading services.

### WHAT IS A STUDY DRAFT?

A study draft is just what the name implies--a draft, not an official, formal proposal. The Fruit and Vegetable Division of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) uses study drafts as a preliminary step in establishing or revising U.S. grade standards for fresh and processed fruits and vegetables.

The purpose of the study draft is to get ideas and comments from those who may be affected by the grade standards before an official proposal is made. Comments are also invited, of course, on official proposals.



## Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

A study draft is usually based on recommendations and requests from the fruit and vegetable industry and on the findings of field investigations by standardization specialists in the Fruit and Vegetable Division.

The Fruit and Vegetable Division distributes study drafts as widely as possible to eliminate major faults and to see if the ideas under consideration are practical and have enough support to justify an official proposal. A specified period is allowed for comments to be made directly to the Fruit and Vegetable Division.

#### HOW CAN I GET A COPY OF A STUDY DRAFT?

Members of the fruit and vegetable industry may obtain copies from their grower or trade associations. Packers and processors may also get copies from the Fruit and Vegetable Division. Consumers should check with their local or State consumer protection agency or private consumer group. The Fruit and Vegetable Division distributes study drafts to industry associations, trade papers, consumer organizations and writers.

#### WHAT IF I NEED MORE INFORMATION?

After a study draft is distributed, standardization or inspection specialists may meet with interested groups to explain and demonstrate what the study draft means. This usually takes place during the 3 to 6 months following distribution of the draft. Get in touch with the appropriate office listed at the end of the fact sheet if you wish to have a demonstration.

#### WHAT HAPPENS AFTER COMMENTS ARE SENT ON A STUDY DRAFT?

When the time for comment is up, standardization specialists evaluate the views and suggestions received on a study draft and decide whether or not there is sufficient justification and support for a proposal. If there is, the Fruit and Vegetable Division prepares an official proposal for publication in the Federal Register under a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.

The steps in publication of an official proposal are:

1. A specified period of time is allowed for comments. The formal comments, filed with the departmental Hearing Clerk, become part of official USDA records and are available for public inspection.
2. AMS evaluates the comments and decides whether to issue, revise, or withdraw the proposed standards.
3. If issued, the standards are published in the Federal Register giving the date they will become effective. The effective date must be at least 30 days after publication.

4. If the proposal is revised or withdrawn, notice is also published in the Federal Register.

5. A press release is usually issued announcing the proposal and the final action taken.

#### IS MY INPUT ON STUDY DRAFTS REALLY IMPORTANT?

Yes. Comments are essential to development of satisfactory, practical, and useful standards. However, a simple "for" or "against" opinion is not enough. USDA specialists need supporting facts, reasons, research, and other information to arrive at a decision.

Remember, the study draft is not a proposal--it is still only a preliminary step to consider the desirability of making a proposal--and the views and suggestions of those affected by the standards are important. Also keep in mind that the official proposal is not a final standard, and it may be changed based on comments received.

#### HOW LONG DOES THE PROCEDURE OF ESTABLISHING OR REVISING GRADE STANDARDS TAKE?

The entire procedure--from study draft to formal adoption of new or revised standards--may take as little as 3 months or as much as 2 years. This depends largely on the commodity involved, the nature of the changes, or the problems that must be resolved. With very minor changes, little preliminary investigation is needed and sometimes the study draft is omitted.

#### WHERE DO I SEND MY COMMENTS ON STUDY DRAFTS?

On fresh fruits & vegetables:

Chief, Fresh Products Standard-  
ization and Inspection Branch  
Fruit & Vegetable Division  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D.C. 20250

On processed fruits & vegetables:

Chief, Processed Products Standard-  
ization and Inspection Branch  
Fruit & Vegetable Division  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D.C. 20250

